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THE FOREST

Big River State Forest, in western Illinois, is 6 miles north of Oquawka on the Oquawka-Keithsburg blacktop road in Henderson County. The forest is primarily managed as an area for the demonstration of sound forestry practices on barren sand lands. Arrangements may be made by any interested group for demonstrations and talks on forestry practices with the district forester or resident forest manager.

HISTORY

The 2,671-acre forest was acquired by the state through five separate purchases, beginning in 1941 and 1942. The largest acquisition was in 1969. Additional land of 126 acres leased from the U. S. Army Corps of engineers and the 200-acre state-owned Oquawka Refuge brings the total land acreage to 2,997.

THE NATURAL SCENE

Terrain: Big River State Forest is situated on the broad sandy intermediate terrace that exists between the Mississippi River flood plain adjacent to the forest on the west, and the bluffs and upland agricultural land to the east.

Big River soils are sandy and not well suited for agricultural purposes or even for the production of commercially desirable hardwood timber stands. Most of the area is native scrub oak, consisting of black oak, blackjack oak and some hickory. Approximately 140 acres had been cleared for unsuccessful farming operations.

Vegetation: The open fields had been abandoned prior to state acquisition and were in an idle, unproductive state. Vegetation consisted of cactus, panic grass, ragweed and goldenrod, along with other broad-leaved weeds and a few patches of native prairie grasses. Some areas have since been planted to pine and are in various stages of development.

The existing hardwood forest land consists of low commercial value scrub timber that has been badly abused by high grading, grazing and fire.



TIMBER STAND CONVERSION

Much of the forest is undergoing timber stand conversion to demonstrate the feasibility of growing profitable pine forests on this type of sand land. This consists of removing the scrub hardwood, salvaging the salable material for pulpwood, controlling hardwood reproduction and planting to white and red pine, which develops rapidly and shows excellent promise for the future. Through the years these practices have been emulated by other landowners, resulting in the establishment of hundreds of acres of successful pine plantations throughout the area.

FOREST FIRES

Fires, which were fairly common in the past, now occur rarely since adjacent landowners are aware of the detrimental effects of fire to their own timberlands. A fire tower is located at the

headquarters area, as well as ready fire fighting crews and equipment to protect the forest during periods of threatened fire and damage.

Sixty miles of firebreaks interlace the forest, separating it into various compartments for management purposes as well as providing access and fire protection. Hiking and horseback riding are allowed on the firebreaks. Deep loose sand prohibits the use of the firebreaks by vehicles other than those with four-wheel drive or tractors.

OQUAWKA REFUGE

The Oquawka Refuge, acquired in 1925, contains the well-known Milroy plantation. This 17-acre planting of red, white and jack pine was established in 1928 and is the oldest pine plantation in the area. Trees are now 12-14 inches in diameter and 50 feet in height.



FACILITIES

Picnicking: There are several scattered picnic areas along Campbell Slough and Putney's Landing. Tables, camp stoves and drinking water are available.

Camping: Tent and trailer sites are available at Putney's Landing and in the northwest corner of the forest. Group camping is permitted; groups of over 25 persons must have advance permission to enter the forest. All campers must obtain a permit from the site manager.

Boating and Fishing: There are three boat launching ramps along the Mississippi River. Boat rentals are not provided.

Fishing can be done from a boat or the banks of the Mississippi River. Crappie, bass, carp, buffalo, channel cat, bluegill and bullhead are the most common fish that inhabit these waters.

Hiking: The network of firebreaks may be used for hiking and backpacking as well as by bird watcher and nature study groups.

Horseback Riding: The riding of horses is also allowed on the firebreaks. Horse rentals are not available.

Hunting: With all types of existing cover and plenty of nearby water, the forest contains numerous small game animals such as quail, squirrel and rabbit, as well as deer. Waterfowl hunting is popular. Wood duck, blue and green-winged teal, mallard, shoveller and Canada geese are familiar in the area.

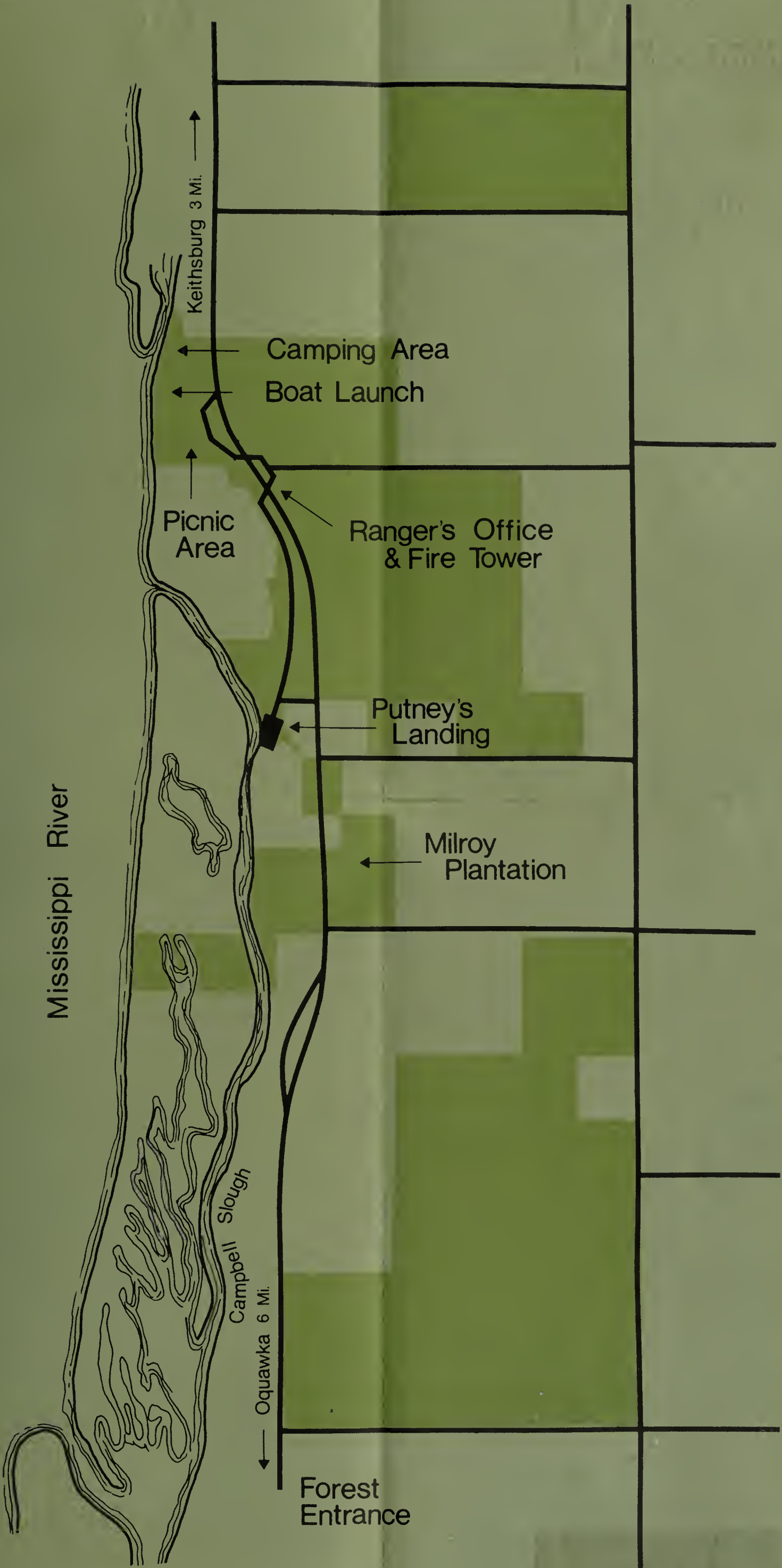
Food patches have been planted throughout the forest to supplement existing food and to improve habitat for upland game.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

Other state forests include Trail of Tears in southern Illinois, and Hidden Springs and Sand Ridge, both in central Illinois.

For more details, contact Ranger, RR 1, Keithsburg, 61442, phone 309/374-2496. For information on other Illinois sites, write the Department of Conservation, Information/Education Section, State Office Building, Springfield, 62706.





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